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ABSTRACT

One of the programs included in "Effective Reading Programs....," is this program begun in 1969 which uses a language experience approach during the first three years of the children's education, kindergarten through second grade. The primary objective is to develop an initial sight vocabulary and word recognition skills in each child by using the child's own language. The children develop their own basic sight vocabularies and use the words in a variety of ways--for building sentences, for classifying according to function or type, for alphabetizing in preparation for using a dictionary, and as materials for phonics instruction. As the children's vocabulary increases, they are introduced to basal readers to develop reading-thinking skills. Beginning with the second grade, equal emphasis is placed on wide inquiry-type reading, using the library as the principal source of materials. The program places a strong emphasis on language arts and reading, and teachers correlate this approach with other curriculum areas, with the exception of arithmetic and handwriting. (TO/AIF)

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RIGHT TO READ LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

CAMBRIDGE, MARYLAND

PROGRAM SIZE AND TARGET POPULATION

About 725 children in grades K-2 were involved in the Language-Experience Program. The children, many of whom came from low-income families, lived in a small city and a rural agricultural and tidewater area. Approximately 65% of the children were white and 35% were black.

YEAR STARTED

The program began in 1969.

STAFF

The administrative staff who spent part of their time on this program included the supervisor of elementary education, the principal, and assistant principal. The instructional staff consisted of 28 teachers, 31 aides, 2 resource teachers, 1 librarian, and 20 trained parent volunteers. At the request of the principal, teacher, or parent, a home-bridger worked with parents and the school to resolve problems a child was experiencing. In-service training was conducted by two reading experts, who spent a total of 70 days each year demonstrating techniques in the classroom and holding meetings with teachers to develop special competencies.

MAJOR FEATURES

The reading program in Dorchester County is based on five state-wide reading goals for which each of our schools is accountable. The state-wide goals are:

1. Each student will be able to utilize a variety of reading materials.
2. Each student will be able to use a word recognition system.
3. Each student will be able to comprehend various reading materials.

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4. Each student will be able to meet the reading demands of functioning in society.

5. Each student will be able to select reading as a personal activity.

Within this framework the Right to Read Language-Experience Program in Dorchester County was initiated for the primary grades. The Language-Experience Approach is a process of teaching reading which utilizes the child's own oral language and concepts to develop an initial sight vocabulary and beginning word recognition skills. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #2) As the child's sight vocabulary increases and he becomes more adept in dealing with unknown words in context, his reading instruction is broadened to include the use of a wide variety of materials such as accounts written or dictated by his peers, tradebooks, basal readers, and periodicals. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1 & 3)

As an integrated language arts program, instruction in listening, oral language, reading, and writing are closely correlated and are mutually reinforcing. Oral language development is a vital part of all phases of the program. Children are encouraged to become actively involved in various activities including many first hand experiences which provide opportunities to manipulate things, ideas, and language. To further promote growth in language skills, both semantically and syntactically, children also participate

in numerous listening activities such as story-reading times, records, and tapes. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1 & 3) Spontaneous and provoked verbal interaction with peers, oral discussions, dictating accounts, and creative writing activities all promote the use of newly acquired vocabulary, ideas, and varying language patterns. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #2 & 3) Creative writing, where each child writes his own accounts, is introduced early in the first grade, thus fully utilizing the interrelationships among the language arts to develop each of them individually and concurrently.

The decision to use the Language-Experience Approach in Dorchester County, as outlined by Russell Stauffer,[1] was based on some specific considerations. First, it was felt that children needed and would benefit most from such a rich language-thinking oriented program. Secondly, since the program is based on the premise that reading should be taught as a thinking process from the very beginning of instruction, it would help integrate the five state-wide reading goals. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of research regarding the interrelationships among the various language arts (Hildreth, 1948; Artley, 1950; Bougere, 1966; Weber, 1970) and implications drawn from these studies would suggest capitalizing on these inter-

[1]Stauffer, Russell G. The Language-Experience Approach to the Teaching Reading. Harper & Row, 1970

relationships to teach reading. The research of Strickland (1962) and Loban (1963) suggest that greater correspondence and consistency are needed in structuring the language of the materials for teaching reading to the children's language needs and abilities. The Language-Experience Approach lends itself to this desired congruence.

Recent work in psycholinguistics regarding the process of reading lends further support to the concept that children's own language patterns could be used effectively to teach beginning reading. Such a position contends that reading is largely a conceptual activity and that readers continually use syntactic and semantic information as they identify words. (Anisfeld, 1968; Goodman, 1968; Carroll, 1966; Webster, 1968; Ryan and Senmell, 1969; Kohlers, 1969) The use of a child's own language for beginning reading material would allow for maximum utilization of syntactic and semantic information to aid him in word identification. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #2)

TEACHING PROCEDURES

Initially teachers use some kind of first hand experiences to promote cognitive and linguistic interactions among the children. These activities provide opportunities for children to react to the attributes and actions of a turtle, to make candy, or other similar concrete experiences. Following this, the children dictate an account which the teacher writes verbatim. During the early stages these are group dictations but as soon as possible each child dictates his

own account. These are then reread with the teacher, individually read, and shared with peers over a period of two to three days. During the teacher-child sessions, much work is done from the context of the dictations to develop a basic sight vocabulary and an integrated use of word attack skills including the use of context clues, structural analysis, and phonic analysis. This functional stress in word recognition from the beginning of reading instruction enables each student to begin to develop a word recognition system when he is reading on his own. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #2)

Words from the child's dictated accounts, which are recognized and remembered in isolation after at least twenty-four hours, are printed on small cards and placed in the child's individual "word bank." This "word bank" becomes the basis of his sight vocabulary and is used to reinforce phonic and structural analysis skills. It is also used to further develop concepts through various classification activities and to extend creative language usage by using the words in a variety of ways such as to individually compose simple phrases, sentences, and stories which can be shared. Each child also locates these words in other materials such as newspapers, magazines and books. These kinds of activities give him recontact with his basic sight vocabulary. At the same time, since he has to deal with these words in other contexts, such activities enable him to begin to deal with language and ideas other than his own. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1 & 2)

As facility in word recognition skills increases and larger sight vocabularies are acquired, individually dictated accounts are exchanged among the children. This provides early opportunities for them to read and understand ideas created by others. Since others in the class dictated about the same topics, using diverse, but similar language structures, children realize early that reading is a communication of ideas and not just a process of being able to say words. They also begin to develop a method for using the pattern of thought in the message in order to understand the meaning. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #3)

At the same time the children are exploring, discussing, dictating, and writing about a specific topic, a wide variety of related materials is introduced. Again, since much of the vocabulary relating to the topic will be the same as that which was used by children, they can begin to deal with the language and ideas of adult writers in a functional and purposeful manner. This early use of a wide variety of printed and non-printed materials helps the child gain the habit of using these materials to extend his knowledge in areas relevant to his interests and needs. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1 & 5) It is readily apparent that the use of the classroom and central school library is of major importance throughout the program.

As previously stated, the Language-Experience Program in Dorchester County is an integrated language arts program.

As such, extensive creative writing activities are a vital component of all its phases. In addition to his continued dictation, each child is encouraged to write his own accounts when handwriting facility is acquired, approximately 50-70 known words are accumulated in his word bank, and stable phoneme-grapheme relationships of most consonant sounds are mastered. Emphasis in creative writing is on the recording and communication of a child's own ideas. Mechanical skills such as spelling, punctuation, and correct form are not stressed at this time. Children are prompted to spell, as best they can, the words they wish to use and they are encouraged to apply the phonic skills they have acquired. At no time is spelling or other mechanical skills allowed to impede the major objective -- the communication of ideas. Stories are never corrected in the normal sense of the term. Some children are introduced to creative writing by mid-October of the first grade. Other children begin creative writing as they develop the necessary readiness skills. After beginning this activity, the children generally do some writing every day. These writing activities continue through the grades and are incorporated in all curriculum areas.

Specific instruction in critical reading-thinking skills through Directed Reading-Thinking Activities (DRTA) is introduced when several children have developed a sufficient sight vocabulary. Each of these children should have approximately

150 words in his word bank and have been reading books independently.

Through the DRTA process the child develops the skill of using his own experiences and knowledge about the content to ask a variety of questions and to find suitable answers to these questions. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #3) In the group Directed Reading-Thinking Activities emphasis is placed on setting pupil purposes, reading to find answers to support or reject pupil conjectures, reading orally to prove points, and reading to solve problems. Words introduced as new are not taught in advance of reading the story. Children are given an opportunity to use the word attack skills which they have acquired to deal with the new words in the context of the story setting. This prepares them to be able to independently attack unknown words when they are reading on their own. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #2)

Teachers continue instruction in word recognition skills, extend vocabulary meanings and concepts, and provide oral language development type activities in which the children actively participate. Although the basal readers provide one source of the stories used to develop the reading-thinking skills through the DRTA process, other materials are often used. Much emphasis is still placed on children reading a wide variety of books and magazines independently. Time is provided for teachers and children to read independently

and share that which they have found personally interesting to them. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #5) This personal reading also reinforces and extends the reading skills and vocabulary acquired during the specific reading instruction times. Time is also provided daily for the teacher to read orally to the children, thus exposing them to a wide range of children's literature.

The critical reading-thinking skills developed during the DRTA sessions are functionally applied and extended when using self-selected materials during the Inquiry Reading teaching-learning sessions.[2] When children are able to handle materials at approximately a second reader level, the Language Arts block of time is devoted every other month exclusively to individualized Inquiry Reading. Thereafter, this instruction time is equally divided between Inquiry Reading instruction and group Directed Reading-Thinking Activities.

In the individualized reading program emphasis is not only placed on the use of a wide variety of self-selected materials, but upon children first declaring specific interest areas, posing their own questions as to what they specifically wish to find out about their topics, and then choosing and using those materials which are relevant to their objectives. Subskills include knowing the availability of a variety of printed and non-printed sources, choosing those which are suitable in difficulty and content, locating the required information, and mastering the techniques

[2]Stauffer, Russell G. Directing the Reading-Thinking Process. Harper & Row, 1975

of classifying and ordering the information so gained. The program also emphasizes the sharing of some information gained from these reading experiences in an interesting manner, such as a mural, T.V. or radio show, panel discussion, etc. This Inquiry Reading is geared to each child's cognitive, reading, and interest levels. It is regulated by each child's interests, experiences, and capacity to make decisions about what he selects to learn about, the materials he decides to use, how he processes and evaluates information, and what he does with the information obtained. This type of reading enables the pupils to become involved in a wide range of curriculum areas which is not usually encountered in programs primarily utilizing basal readers or various programmed materials. In Inquiry Reading the children are exposed early to a variety of materials and learn to choose and use those materials which can most effectively fulfill their own needs. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1,2,3,4,5) Therefore, a well stocked instructional media center is necessary to provide the kind of materials which the children will be expected to deal with as they continue to function throughout their lives.

It is apparent that the Language-Experience Program in Dorchester County is characterized by a variety of grouping arrangements which is determined by the instructional needs of each child. Much emphasis is placed on working with children individually and children working together in groups. These groups can be spontaneously formed or de-

termined by the teacher according to the children's skill needs, interest needs, or social-emotional needs. Therefore, the classrooms need to be rich learning environments providing many activities from which children can make intelligent choices to self-direct their learning.

Continuing in-service training by people knowledgeable in reading instruction must be provided to implement and maintain this multi-method approach. This on-going in-service training will be most effective if it is provided on both a group and individual basis. Group meetings should be centered around assessing children's strengths and weaknesses, demonstrating effective teaching techniques, providing challenging independent activities, and sharing procedures which teachers are finding successful. Individual follow-through must be made at the classroom level to help each teacher develop classroom management procedures which enables him to implement a multi-method approach to reading instruction for each child.

EVALUATION

Formal and informal evaluative measures have substantiated that the children who were in the Language-Experience Program performed at higher reading levels than would be expected in each of the five state-wide reading goals.

Kindergarten students raised their raw scores on the Preschool Inventory 12.4 points between September and May. First grade students, whose scoring averaged the 35th percentile at the beginning of the first grade on the Metropolitan Readiness

Tests, scored at the 2.2 level on the Word Recognition subtest and at the 2.5 level on the Spelling subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test, Primary I at the end of the first grade. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #2) These first grade students also scored at the 2.1 level on the Paragraph Meaning subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test, Primary I at the end of the year. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #3)

Second grade students scored at the 2.9 level on the Word Recognition subtest and at the 3.1 level on the Spelling subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test, Primary II at the end of the second grade. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #2) They scored at the 2.8 level on the Paragraph Meaning subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test, Primary II at the end of the year. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #3)

Informal teacher judgment revealed that first grade students had an average of 27 individually dictated stories in their own personal storybook. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1,2,3) More than half of the first grade students were performing in basal readers at a second grade reading level or above at the end of the first grade. These students had completed an average of four primers, three first readers, and one second reader. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1,2,3) They had also read an average of 35 trade books. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1,2,3,4,5)

First graders who were reading at a first reader level at the end of the first grade had read an average of three primers, one first reader, and thirteen trade books. Those who were reading at the primer level had completed an average of one primer and six trade books. Less than 4% of the first graders were reading below the primer level basal reader. However, the children who were reading at the primer level or experience story level had an average of 59 known words in the individual word banks. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #2)

Second grade teachers indicated that their children had an average of 23 individually dictated stories in their own personal storybooks. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1,2,3) More than half of the children were performing at a third reader level or above at the end of the second grade. These children had completed an average of one primer or first reader, five second readers, one and one-half third readers or above, and six self-selection Inquiry Reading topics. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1,2,3,4,5) Students who were performing at the second grade reading level completed an average of three primers and first readers, one and one-half second readers, and three self-selection Inquiry Reading topics. Less than 8% of the students were reading below a second grade reading level. These students completed an average of four primers, two first readers, and two self-selection Inquiry Reading topics.

In addition to the wide reading which the students did throughout the year, first graders personally wrote an average of 51 dif-

ferent accounts and second graders averaged writing 86 different accounts independently. (Maryland Reading Accountability Goals #1,2,3,4)

Some candid remarks are also descriptive of the learning environment which the Language-Experience Program has helped create. A first grade teacher said, "During the P.T.A. meetings, I have heard many positive comments about our program. The parents say their children won't let them do anything but read. At home they are always seeking new materials to show 'Mommy' they can read." (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #5) From a second grade teacher, "Parents are concerned and want their children to continue in a similar program." Another parent adds, "My son is more interested in reading -- the other children before him did not have this desire to read on their own." (Maryland Reading Accountability Goal #5) and the assistant principal concludes with, "This is the happiest group of children I've ever seen."

FACILITIES, MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT

The program operates in self-contained and open space classrooms, which are conducive to either group or individualized instruction. In addition to the teacher-prepared word cards and the children's stories, the program uses basal readers, many library books, magazines, multimedia equipment and games. Teachers check out materials from a multimedia center where they are catalogued and housed.

COST

The total cost of instructional materials for a class of 30 is $719. The average annual per-pupil cost for the regular district program is $1,099. The annual per-pupil cost of this program exceeds that by less than $50.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Dorothy B. Nave
Supervisor of Elementary Schools
Dorchester County Board of Education
403 High Street
Cambridge, Maryland 21613